Good, Clever and Wise: A study of political meaning-making among integral change agents

Thomas Jordan in an Interview with Russ Volckmann

Abstract: Thomas Jordan discusses the intellectual and research foundations that have led to his creation of a consciousness development model. In interview research that he conducted among selected personnel in Swedish defense and security agencies, Jordan has focused on three key skill sets: consciousness skills, self-awareness and embeddedness or identification. From this he has identified seven characteristics that show up in various patterns among those he interviewed. The first three—good, clever, and wise—are key characteristics. The next four follow from them: curious, inventive, modest and handy. These show up in variable combinations among these integral change agents involved with promoting change within political institutions.

Key words: Integral, change agent, consciousness, skills, political, meaning-making.

Q: *While your work historically has been focused on conflict management, since about 1998 you've been writing about development and politics while drawing on diverse theoretical approaches to do that. We're going to be considering the work you're currently doing. As a way of starting us off, what brought you to this work?*

A: The research I'm finishing now is about integral change agents, primarily in governmental organizations. I tried to find individuals who make sense of themselves, their aims and their world in terms of what we technically would call late post-conventional meaning-making. These are people who are unusually aware, sophisticated in their understanding of causality and have a deep, personal engagement with some kind of existential values—values that serve the whole, rather than some partial interest.

I'm doing this research with project financing from the Swedish Emergency Management Agency. That means I am focusing on people who work with societal security issues in a very broad sense (see Table 1). Some of them work with defense policies and others with internal security, for example, addressing how we can prevent society from disintegrating into a situation where we have a lot of street violence. All of the people I have interviewed in this project are in some way engaged with issues involving how we keep a decent society.

Table 1: Positions of Those Interviewed

Profiles of Interviewees	
Positions	**Total**
Officials and experts at ministries of the Swedish government	5
Senior officials in Swedish government agencies	5
Police officers in various functions	4
Officials with policy making and organizational development tasks, City Office of Gothenburg, Sweden's second largest city	2
High-ranking officer in the Swedish Armed Forces	1
Consultant working for the Swedish Armed Forces and Police	1
University professor	1
Total	19

Q: Is this a significant new step for you?

A: There is a very straight line from what I have been doing for the last 20 years or even more. I have always been rather obsessed with trying to understand why the world looks like it does and why things happen the way they do. I have a very deep interest in understanding the inequalities in the world and finding some way to work with reducing suffering.

I started out trying to understand the world through economics, economic geography and similar sciences. Then I moved to looking more at how human consciousness works and to use that as a perspective for understanding societal conflicts on various scales. I've spent a very long time getting familiar with and learning to use theories on adult development and consciousness development in order to make them into tools for understanding political development and processes of various kinds. Thus, it's quite natural that I end up working with these issues.

Q: As a way of laying a foundation it might be useful for us to take a look at what are those models and constructs that have been significant for the work you're doing now.

A: I've always been interested in psychology as a way of understanding how people behave in social interactions. In the mid '80's I read two books that turned my whole conceptual framework upside down. One of them was Stanislav Grof's *Realms of the Human Unconscious.* The other was Ken Wilber's *Up from Eden***.** They were very significant in different ways for the development of how I have been approaching these matters. Perhaps Wilber's book is more relevant to what I am doing today than Grof's.

The most important thing with Wilber's book was that it painted a vision of human history—cultural history, societal history—that focuses on the relationship between structures of human consciousness development on the one hand and societal systems, structures and cultures on the other hand. Reading that book gave me a key I had been looking for to understand politics. It started a process in which I quite systematically went to Wilber's theoretical sources.

I've focused mostly on the research-based sources. I've spent many years reading the research on adult development, ego development, consciousness development, and ego transcendence. In this very rich literature there are of course some researchers who have been more important to me than others. Among my favorites are Robert Kegan and the whole area of ego development psychology with Jane Loevinger, Lawrence Kohlberg, Michael Basseches, Robert Selman, Bill Torbert, Susann Cook-Greuter and a lot of other people.

So the research I have been influenced by has focused on cognitive development and ego development. I'm also very influenced by spiritual traditions, primarily Buddhism.

One very important person for me was Trungpa Rinpoche whose books I read early on. He influenced my thinking very much. I've been reading a lot of Buddhist literature, mainly Tibetan and Zen Buddhism, Thich Nhat Hahn, for example. Like Wilber, I find it very productive to make use of the Western traditions of empirical psychological research into meaning-making structures and Eastern traditions about how human consciousness actually works.

Q: Has this resulted in your developing a framework for integrating these?

A: Yes. I spent quite a lot of time trying to put together many different models and dimensions of consciousness development. Wilber talks about lines of development and tries to relate different models to each other by saying that they focus on different aspects of consciousness development. But Wilber has been quite reluctant to spell out details or delve into the more intricate aspects of how those different lines of development relate to each other and what it means when you look at them in an interrelated way.

It has been an important personal project for me to try to develop a conceptual framework for putting those different dimensions of consciousness development to work when I'm trying to understand such things as security policy reasoning or how people generally behave in various kinds of conflicts, like workplace conflicts.

What I have is not at all a finished framework, but I find it very productive to think about consciousness development in terms of three different aspects, three different approaches into the field. The first is related to what we could call *consciousness skills.* That is what the theories about cognitive development are very much about—for example the complexity in how you construct causality in the physical, social and psychological worlds. It is about such things as role-taking: what skills you have in imagining how differently other people think; or capacity to construct and use abstract, subtle and paradoxical concepts.

There are very many different models discussing various aspects of cognitive and consciousness skills, not only the cognitive part of it in a narrower sense, but also what is generally called emotional intelligence: how you can use your way of relating to people, use your empathy, using your tone of voice and such things in order to influence what happens in communication and relationships.

Q: What do you mean by cognitive? We may tend to associate that with "intellectual" and it sounds like you're going beyond that.

A: Cognition is not only discursive thinking, but also involves other types of mental representations and information processing, such as imaginal and symbolical processes. It includes the way you make images of things that happen, for example. It is about everything that goes on in your mind in terms of your thoughts about things, the way you make story lines out of what happens in your life, the way you think about things, the way you reason about cause and consequence and so on. So cognitive for me is really a very broad category and has a very broad spectrum of development as well.

When we look, for example, at Jane Loevinger's ego development theory and stages, we can see how—in the course of development—language becomes more and more differentiated. In early stages of ego development you have access to a very simple and crude repertoire of concepts and words in order to discern and describe inner states and what happens in the environment. Developing an increasingly differentiated repertoire of concepts and symbols is a key aspect of cognitive development. It allows a person to discern nuances, ambiguity and complexity.

Q: It has to do with the capacity to differentiate?

A: That's one important aspect of cognitive development, yes.

Q: So far, cognitive is about thought and the capacity to differentiate with greater complexity, as well as emotional intelligence. What would you add to that?

A: Cognitive processes include the whole imaginal realm of using non-verbal symbols and images. Academics may have a tendency to focus on rational thinking, but in understanding how people function in daily life we need to pay attention to how people make sense of events by creating stories. These stories make little use of logical analysis, but draw on metaphor, mythical themes, dramaturgical figures and so on.

Q: And what would you add to the arena of consciousness skills?

A: Unfortunately there is too little empirical research into development of skills in the realms of feeling, intuition, sensory-motor reflexes and pure action. We learn more by imitation than by intellectually understanding and many skills we use in highly purposeful ways cannot be articulated in discourse. So I hope we will see an expansion of knowledge about consciousness skills related to emotion, imagination, intuition, action, etc.

Q: Consciousness skills is the first aspect. What's the second one?

A: The second is *self-awareness.* I use the term self-awareness with a very specific meaning, in a very specific sense. I mean the capacity or presence you have in relation to your own on-going subjective processes. What's going on in yourself? I think this can be best understood if you are somewhat familiar with Robert Kegan's subject-object framework. He talks about the very important aspect of human development where you are able to take different things as objects for reflection, as objects for awareness.

Self-awareness means that you notice that you have certain patterns of thought operating in you. You can take your own thinking operations as an object of awareness. You can look at your patterns of thinking. You can reflect on those patterns. You are aware that those patterns happen in your mind. The same goes for other types of subjective processes such as emotion, the attitudes you develop toward other people, towards your wishes and cravings and so on—all the things that the spiritual traditions work with.

Q: Would it be fair to say that consciousness skills as you are describing them relate to our life conditions and self-awareness is their interiority or is there a more complex relationship between the two?

A: They are very strongly interrelated. The distinction is somewhat artificial, but if you look at skills and you look at the theories describing different kinds of consciousness skills, they always emphasize increasing complexity and increasing sophistication in those skills. But self-awareness has not very much to do with increasing complexity and increasing levels of sophistication, but more with actually noticing that certain things are going on in yourself. You are no longer a captive of your own subjective processes, but you can develop a witnessing ability. The witness self, which spiritual traditions talk a lot about, is the principle operating in self-awareness. You develop more and more of an ability to witness your own subjective processes.

That's central in understanding, for example, how people behave in conflicts. Some people are not really aware that what they feel towards another person is a process going on inside themselves. They tend to feel that when they dislike a person that is a direct consequence of that person having bad qualities. But persons who in a very clear way are aware of this process as going on inside themselves can differentiate between their own psychological processes and the inherent characteristics or the processes going on in other people.

I would say that skills have more to do with the level of capacity you have for understanding complex systems and so on, whereas self-awareness has more to do with your presence in relation to your own processes. In Buddhism and other spiritual traditions when you start meditating you start observing your thoughts, the mind streams going on in your own consciousness. That doesn't necessarily mean that when you can differentiate your witnessing ability from the cognitive processes going on in your mind, that you can look at the thoughts floating up in your mind and that those thoughts are very sophisticated. They can be quite simple.

Persons at a very simple level of cognitive development can develop a high level of self-awareness, but that doesn't mean that they automatically are particularly skilled in understanding complex systems of causation and so on. There is a point in differentiating between skills on the one hand and self-awareness on the other hand. They tell us very different things about how a person's consciousness operates. I think there are many monks in the Buddhist tradition, for example, who have very high levels of self-awareness, but not very high levels of sophistication in their consciousness skills. They weren't trained in sophisticated thinking operations. But since they know their thinking processes are subjective, they are perhaps not so inclined to be convinced that they already know everything, which is of course a great advantage.

Q: What is the third area?

A: The third I tend to call either *self-embeddedness* or perhaps a more accessible term: *identification.* The first two dimensions or aspects describe what you can do, but not what you *want* to do. Self-embeddedness includes those lines of development that have to do with what you find important, what you identify with, how you identify yourself. What kind of self image you have, what kind of value systems you are embedded in, what kind of morals you feel committed to and so on.

In the self-embeddedness aspect of consciousness development we find, for example, Robert Kegan's or parts of Jane Loevinger's ego development models. We also find models related to moral development or collective identifications. That's a very interesting aspect: what kind of collective you feel you are a part of. We also have Spiral Dynamics with the emphasis on value systems. What values do people identify with?

I think it's important to differentiate those three aspects of consciousness development, because no one of them can be reduced to the other.

Q: As I understand the framework that you've put forth so far, you're suggesting that these three areas are useful ways to cluster lines of development and to begin to think about the relationships among lines of development, is that correct?

A: Yes, exactly. They constitute a framework that may offer tools that can help us understand unique patterns of meaning-making. One of the criticisms I have about taking stage models too seriously—any of the different brands that are around—is that they may reduce our sense of the uniqueness among individuals or cultures. With a more open-ended framework defining different lines of development and formulating questions, rather than focusing on the definition of discrete stages, we can have much more openness towards understanding what is unique about meaning-making patterns of a certain individual or a certain group. And that's very valuable.

Q: In one of your papers, you differentiate between idiographic and nomothetic approaches to research. Are you basically arguing for this framework to support an idiographic approach?

A: I think nomothetic and idiographic approaches are necessary, but I feel that there has been too much emphasis on nomothetic approaches, that is approaches that try to develop theories that are universally valid and describe reality in, for example, a stage model. Idiographic approaches use theory in order to understand unique circumstances and unique individuals. I think that we need more of that if we want to be able to carry out really good empirical research on these matters.

Q: The idiographic approach basically allows us to use theory to help us understand what is happening for an individual or in a current situation in some social system. Is that true?

A: Yes.

Q: *By being able to use theory to help us create distinctions in a social system for ourselves and others we have an applied approach to creating change—well, first to creating meaning and presumably by creating meaning, then to creating change, be it the resolution of a conflict or the development of more capacity within a particular social system?*

A: Yes, that's how I see these things. I think that in order to be really useful for working with the real world our theoretical frameworks have to be very context sensitive. They have to be adaptable and flexible in order to make it possible to understand the variations and the nuances in what we encounter and identify what are the really relevant aspects of what is going on out there. If we who work with theoretical development in the integral paradigm want to be useful for a wider world we have to go in that direction—not only—but also in that direction.

Q: *Returning to these three elements or aspects in the framework you're using, you've also talked about the interplay among them, the relationships among them. I'm wondering if you have any construct or any framework for talking about that process, that dynamic?*

A: Not really. Only that I find it very productive to have these distinctions in the back of my mind when I interpret interviews, when I look for patterns in meaning-making of, for example, a political party or a group in a conflict—how they make sense of what is happening in their world. Then I find that this theoretical frame allows me to recognize the patterns operating in a very differentiated way. I have not, at least yet, tried to theorize very much about that in terms of a general theory about how these different aspects of development relate to each other. It might possibly be done, but I think we haven't come very far yet.

Q: *How do you use this framework to begin to talk about integral politics or to make meaning in looking at situations involving politics from an integral perspective?*

A: I've spent a lot of time looking into all those different theories about consciousness development in order to fashion tools for understanding societal processes, in particular conflicts of various kinds. I was invited to one of the early meetings at the Politics branch of the Integral Institute almost five years ago. I found it very interesting and productive to think about the concept of integral politics. What would integral politics be?

Some people regard integral politics as a kind of ideological framework that would replace existing ideologies by transcending them and integrating various kinds of values. I tend to think about integral politics not so much in terms of the content, the concrete opinions and policies, but rather in terms of the structure of meaning-making. I think even an integral community will have different political camps: integral conservatives, integral liberals, integral social democrats, etc. The key issues have to do with the ability to balance the spectrum from egocentric to world-centric concerns, the ability to perceive and handle systemic complexity and the capacity to reflect on the patterns of meaning-making.

Q: This is how your framework is applied?

A: Yes. One of the ideas that I had is that we shouldn't just try to develop a conception of integral politics by theoretical reasoning, by deducing integral politics out of some kind of basic principles. I found it attractive to use what we academics call an inductive approach, namely to search for people who have spontaneously developed a capacity for integral meaning-making and then study how these people think about politics. How do they think about their role in politics? How do they go about trying to change things? That has been an idea that has been with me for five or six years, but I didn't have the opportunity to do a project until two years ago.

Q: And that's what you've been engaged in since?

A: Yes, that has been one of the projects I've been carrying out for the last two years. What I could do at first was to explore meaning-making in Swedish defense and security policies. I also did a research project on how people think about what keeps the society decent, i.e., meaning-making in internal security policies. In the course of these two research projects, I had an opportunity to interview about sixty people in various positions in Swedish political and administrative organizations. I got to know quite a lot of people and to meet some very interesting individuals.

In the course of those projects, I thought I could recognize a group of very interesting individuals. I tried to look at them with a mind schooled by the theories I've been working with for a long time now. I thought I could discern certain patterns that fit quite well with certain aspects of consciousness development theory.

So, the background to this project is that I had an initial image of the existence of a group of interesting people active in Swedish authorities, government departments and other organizations. I wanted to have a closer look at them in order to learn how they think about what they're doing, how they define what they find engaging in what they do and how they go about trying to work for change in a complex society. This would be a way to learn about what integral politics might be in practice.

These are not people who have joined university courses in cognitive development theory or anything like that. They don't have a vocabulary for reflecting on and talking about themselves in that way. But they display many of the characteristics described by, for example, Torbert's model for ego development among leaders or Loevinger's, Kegan's and other theories. I devised a strategy for finding and interviewing such people in order to learn more and to use this material to develop a—perhaps I shouldn't say best practice model, but something like that. I want to assemble a portrait of how we can conceive of political change and political work as alternative politics or integral politics. That's what I'm deeply engaged in right now.

Q: Before we go into the study itself in terms of the variables you were just talking about, can we go back to your identification and selection of these individuals? The way I'm interpreting what you are saying is that these are people that, when you talked with them, gave you some indication that they had developed to some higher capacities in the three areas of your framework having to do with consciousness skills, self-awareness skills and

their relationship or levels of identification with what's important in their world, their value systems, their self-embeddedness, is that right?

A: Yes.

Q: Were you able to identify the individuals that you thought might be valuable to talk with in this study because you intuitively picked this up or were there some specific things that helped you select the people that you would include in this study?

A: Well, I had some points to start from that I knew were important and that I could look for in people. So, for example, I looked for people who felt a personal engagement in some kind of world-centric values; that was one of the points. I also looked for people who had a certain kind of interest in complexity. They have a good understanding of complex reasons and interdependencies behind what happens and also a sense for complex consequences. That's not as common as you might think when you look at how people go about their tasks in organizations—commercial or governmental.

Q: Would this piece about complex consequences relate to moving past linear causality into systemic and meta-systemic causality?

A: Yes, exactly. That's exactly what I was after. And a third very important factor was what Wilber could call vision-logic, which I conceive of as the ability to perceive and understand systems of meaning-making—individual and collective systems of meaning-making. This involves people having an intuitive or explicit ability to understand that perspectives or systems of meaning-making are actually very important causes for how people act.

Some of the people I've found have a natural ability to recognize that a person acts in such and such way because they are identified with a certain self image, certain values or they have a certain way of reasoning about causality and so on. That has very, very important consequences for their attitudes towards other people. These are people who have a very low propensity for making enemies out of other people. Even though other people may act in ways they disapprove strongly, they see the underlying reasons for their behavior and, therefore, they don't blame people in the same way that many others would. But these are, of course, very, very complex issues we are going into now.

Q: Was there anything having to do with spirituality or morality that distinguished these people?

A: Few of these people actually talk about spirituality. A few of them do, but most of them don't.

Q: What meaning do you make of that?

A: I'm not sure of how I would define spirituality. You can have two quite different ways of looking at it. One definition of spirituality emphasizes the sense of being in connection with some kind of greater presence or power. It is a very feeling-oriented sense of

spirituality. Another aspect of spirituality is more in terms of ego transcendence—you feel committed to a perspective that goes far beyond your own ego and your egoic needs and interests. For these people I'm studying, I think the second aspect is more pronounced and more important in understanding how they operate. These are not people who talk a lot about God or something like that, but some of them are in fact like Bodhisattvas…

Q: How do you mean they're like Bodhisattvas?

A: A Bodhisattva in the Buddhists world view is an enlightened person who has chosen to stay among humans and to work for other people's enlightenment and liberation from suffering. In particular, the last part is very relevant for many of these people. They have a very, very deep personal commitment to work for other people's liberation from suffering in various forms. This motivation is central to how these individuals choose to work, what kind of positions they look for, what kinds of organizations they belong to and what kinds of tasks they feel are important to engage in.

In a close-to-the-ground sense, these people are like Bodhisattvas. Maybe they don't wallow in cosmic consciousness and feel at one with the world soul and such things, but in a very sincere and personally grounded way they are deeply engaged in working for the good of the whole and working to alleviate human suffering. In that way I feel they quite closely fit into the image of the Bodhisattva.

Q: Having selected the people that you were going to interview, what were you hoping to gather from the interviews?

A: I wanted to invite these people to tell me about how they conceive of what is important. How do they make sense of how social and political processes function? How did they choose to work with and for change? Also, a particularly important question in this research, how do they handle resistance and inertia, because these kinds of processes are very difficult? They are trying to influence and work with governmental policies and large organizations. They work with foreign policy questions, social policy questions, crime and so on. You don't change things very rapidly when you are working there. So, how do they go about using their commitments, their understanding of complexity and their understanding of other people's patterns of meaning-making in order to devise change strategies? That was one very important topic.

Q: Were you using the interviews in part to confirm what you had determined, that these people had the consciousness skills, self-awareness skills and awareness of self-embeddedness and to go beyond that to describe their meaning-making in these areas?

A: You can say mostly the latter. My own personal purpose with this research project is to pinpoint and create a differentiated image of how these people make sense of what they are doing, what their motives are, how they work and also to learn from it, of course. I wanted to go beyond, as you said, these conceptions in order to differentiate and find more nuances in what we are looking at.

Another important purpose with this project is to actually document and show to people that you can make sense of politics in this way. These are real people. They are working in real organizations. They have been doing it for years and years and they actually make sense of their work in this way. There are interesting aspects of how they do this that we could all learn from. So, the target group for my research is not so much the general public, but people who are somewhere in these regions themselves. Here they can get a mirroring of what they are intuitively striving for, but perhaps have not articulated for themselves.

So, I am trying to articulate a kind of underlying logic that some people operate with. I don't think we can teach people at early conventional levels of ego development to develop in this way, but we can smooth the path for people who are already on the way with their own momentum.

Q: *It sounds like the way you found these people is that you used your network very effectively. You talked to people you knew who referred you to people they knew and so forth?*

A: Yes, that's right. And I tried to describe in simple terms what I was looking for. Of course, I couldn't know beforehand if the person I was going to interview actually fit into the target group. Some of the people I interviewed really didn't, but that was also very valuable because it helped me to make differentiations. Looking at how a person with a low level of awareness of his own subjectivity reasons about the resistance his efforts encounters, for example, gives me a better sense of what is characteristic of the people who actually have a high level of self-awareness. The contrast is valuable for discerning patterns.

Q: *How many people did you interview totally?*

A: I have interviewed 19 people in this project, but I also interviewed over 50 people in the earlier projects. Some of those people, reasoned in a way that allowed me in this project to draw on those interviews as well. So, there is a core group and then a wider reference group.

Q: *And the 19 are the people who show a vision-logic level of development?*

A: When you work with real people and real interviews, the differentiations don't get so very clear-cut. What I'm doing is to develop a kind of assembled portrait of a way of making meaning that some people operate with to a very large extent and some other people operate with only partially. There's a spectrum here of some people who very well fit into the model or image I'm assembling and there are some people who partly fit into it. There are a few people who don't fit into it very much at all. So, I have 7 or 8 persons who to a very large extent are similar to the image I'm assembling, whereas the rest to various degrees live up to those different characteristics.

Q: *Having done these interviews, what are some of the conclusions that you've gleaned from this work?*

A: I like being a bit drastic in order to grab people's attention. So, what I have been doing is to start with a very simplified description of this group of people in terms of seven characteristics or traits which I used one word each for. I go on to explain what I mean by those different words and give examples of them with quotes from the interviews.

Q: What are the seven characteristics?

A: They are divided into two categories that grew out of the analysis work over time. There are three characteristics that seem to be fundamental and they are not very much of a surprise when you compare them to consciousness development theories. Those three most fundamental characteristics I call '*Good*,' '*Clever*,' and '*Wise.*' These are people who are good, clever and wise.

'Good' means here that these are people who are strongly committed to some world-centric or holocentric values. However, anyone would say that they are committed to values that are universal. One of the challenges here is to sort out what is actually specific to this group of people in how they construct what is 'good.'

Perhaps it would be to go too far in this interview to delve into the theoretical differentiations here, but what is central is that they have an autonomous set of values that is clearly differentiated from particular story lines. They don't use a great story that points out who is good and who is bad in order make sense of what happens in the world, which would be a mythic-rational pattern of meaning-making. These people also do not use some kind of monological rationality where they use *one* particular ideology or perspective to interpret the world or make sense of what is good and bad. You can show this in their reasoning by looking at how, for example, they are very clearly able to be quite critical of their own country, their own organizations, the policies that their own organizations carry through and so on. They all have a quite distinctly felt autonomous value system to compare with all the time. This value system is clearly differentiated from concrete actors and organizations.

Q: You've called it world-centric. Is it a value system that is transcendent in a sense?

A: Well, this is also simplification.

It is quite useful for talking about these things to differentiate between egocentric, socio-centric and world-centric values. You can go on and talk about cosmos-centric values, for example, but that's not very useful here. It is sufficient to distinguish between three different levels. Egocentric values are values that relate to the individual, to the person. I try to maximize my own advantages and interests as far as I can. Socio-centric values make the interest of a particular collective the center of motivation, whereas world-centric values refer to what is good for the whole.

Q: In this group were you able to distinguish how they related to egocentric values differently than others who would not fit into this group?

A: Yes. That's a very interesting area of exploration, which I think you have to approach in a couple of different ways. One of them is that these are people who don't have very strong ego needs. They are not very strongly motivated by getting acceptance, collecting

admiration from other people, gaining status and so on. In that way, they are quite mature people. They don't define themselves in terms of an idealized ego they have to live up to and get recognition for from other people.

Their egocentric needs are not very strong, but of course, they have them. They have needs for recognition. They have needs for a secure life situation. They have needs for doing meaningful work and so on. But the world-centric values, the existential, principled or universal values they feel committed to constitute a broad frame within which they can try to satisfy their egocentric needs.

There is an interesting relationship between the egocentric and world-centric needs in these people, because they somehow get fused. When you feel a deep, personal commitment to universal values, it also becomes a personal need for you to be able to serve those values, to work for them and to realize them. If you are unable to do so, you feel dissatisfied. If you are able to do it, you feel satisfaction. An important part of the egocentric needs becomes conditioned by the commitment to world-centric values.

Another interesting thing is that these values are not always very clearly articulated among these people. So, it's not always that they can report a list of, "Those and those are the values I feel committed to and that are the compass for what I am doing." But in the course of the interview, you nevertheless get a very strong sense that these people have a kind of internal compass which points out the direction for them to work, but they have not always been able to formulate in concepts, words and discourse what this compass is about. This is theoretically interesting because, in my interpretation, it points to something significant: a world-centric value orientation is not a product of discursive thinking. It seems it is rather a result of a felt commitment and a commitment to 'the Good', a commitment to the health of the whole. But you cannot so easily pinpoint what that means. You cannot make an ideology of it. It is more like a feeling than a discourse. I find that very interesting and would like to explore this theme further.

Q: *Does this have implications for how you would describe self-awareness and self-embeddedness for these people?*

A: This is a very important aspect of self-embeddedness, of course. That's the aspect of consciousness development that most covers the characteristic 'good' here. So, you can use that aspect to discuss what is happening here.

Self-awareness is important for goodness in the sense that these are people who have a clear sense of what are actually their egocentric needs and interests. Therefore, they are able to consciously decide how they should balance their own egocentric interests and needs towards the broader commitment that they have to the good of the whole. So self-awareness is a very important element in creating some kind of solidness in this goodness that these people display.

There is also a last aspect of the characteristic 'good' which is quite self-evident when you think about it. These are people who often feel it is important to work with values. Values are a field of work for them. They find values important and they often engage in organizational change projects that have to do with developing a clear conception of values, of making people reflect on values and develop value systems and so on.

Q: *Would you give an example of that?*

A: One example is a teacher at the National Police Academy in Stockholm who spends a lot of time trying to raise awareness, start discussions and to influence the way the education program is built up in order to emphasize such aspects as respect for people who have a weak position in the society, what that means when the police is out working on the streets and so on. That is one example. There are very many other people who engage in trying to build reflection on values into the organizational culture and structure in various ways.

Q: The second was 'clever.'

A: With 'clever' I mean mainly what we talked about before: a systemic understanding of causality, going beyond linear conceptions of how things happen into a systemic conception of causes and consequences. These are people who are described by others as having some kind of 'strategic overview,' people who can perceive large systems and interactions between different parts of systems, between part and whole and whole and part and between different kinds of systems. Most important—and this is not very simple to put words to—is that these are people who, wherever they go, expect there to be complex causes and consequences of everything. That's not so common as one would think in a society with very highly educated people in authorities and in other organizations. For people to actually use an ongoing awareness of there being complex causes and consequences is not as common as I would have hoped.

Q: Would you give an example of that?

A: Well, when you start talking with these people about a particular project or problem they are working with, they often start with giving a broad background. They talk about changes happening in the society: globalization, the role of the media, technologies, value systems. All those things are long-term processes that change the very conditions for the work they are doing. That's very typical.

They don't narrow down their focus of attention on a small part of the problem. They see the problem in a much broader context. In particular, they have a very keen sense of long-term changes going on, that you have to be aware of those changes and to adapt existing structures and policies to those changed processes. That could be, for example, long-term demographic change in birth rates, migration and settlement patterns that change the conditions for social welfare policies, crime and value formation. It could be how new information technologies change the conditions for political activism and political violence. It could be how the structure of military and civil defense has to adapt to fundamental structural changes in the global security policy system, and so on.

Q: Anything more about 'clever'?

A: These people usually have a long time horizon. They think in terms of slow change processes and they develop a certain patience. They know that these are processes that take a long time. They can contribute to push those processes a little bit in some kind of

direction, but can't expect to achieve radical changes fast. They often engage in change processes that can take a long time.

What is also typical of these persons is that *because* they perceive systems and regard the characteristics of how systems operate as important causes for what happens, they see systems and structures as important fields of work. So, when we look at the 'good' aspects of these people, they like working with values. When we look at the 'clever' aspects of these people, they like working with systems. They like working with how their own organization operates as a social and administrative system. They like working with principles on a large scale.

Q: *As your description of this is unfolding, I get a picture of people who are working within a set of strongly held values, but not looking for a completion. They realize they're in an on-going, organic, dynamic process that probably never ends.*

A: Yes, and if we think about the historical development of politics in the Western world or in the world in general, we know that very much of the political dynamic that has developed comes from political movements having utopian visions of what society ought to be like—the Marxist movement, the Neo-Liberal movement and so on. But these integral thinkers, so to speak, don't find it meaningful to make a blueprint of what a society ought to look like and then try to implement this blueprint. They know that these organic, slow processes are very complex. There are very many conditions and interdependencies in those systems. Therefore, it is meaningless to make a blueprint of what solution would be ideal.

Instead, they look at those complex dynamic processes going on and start thinking about how we can introduce some elements into these processes so that they go in a different direction than they do now. How can we push this complex dynamic system in a certain direction? And then, what does it look like in ten years? It's probably nothing we could have expected because we cannot foresee how these processes are going to unfold in the future.

Q: *That sounds a bit like 'wisdom'?*

A: Yes, in a sense. 'Wise' means here, as I said, vision-logic, the ability to take systems of meaning-making as an object of attention. These are people who are well aware that people make sense of themselves and politics, for example, from within a certain kind of perspective. This has a lot of consequences. One is that these people are not embedded in one particular ideology or perspective, but they can shift among perspectives. They can use more than one perspective for understanding things and they are *interested* in the contrast between different perspectives. It also means that they usually have a certain sense of the characteristics of their own perspective. They know that their own system of interpretation has limitations. That also means that they are open to learning in a way that a more conventional meaning-making system is not open to.

Q: *How do you see the implications of this?*

A: Well, the consequence of being wise is that these are people who are quite interested in initiating processes that might lead to transformations of meaning-making patterns. They

think about how they can create a process or situation that invites people to re-evaluate their values or interpretations and so on.

Q: Did you come across an example of a strategy that was successful in doing that?

A: There are small and large examples of that. A small-scale example is that I can be working in an organization and realize that people around me or people for whom I am the boss may be very concerned with their self-image. They may be anxious about being exposed as incompetent. That means that they close down communication. If you understand that aspect of other people's meaning-making systems, you can start by trying to create safe spaces and trusting relationships so it becomes possible for other people to relax a little bit, open up and then start to engage in processes where they look with more openness toward, for example, critical feedback. People who are very defensive are not very keen on doing that.

At a larger scale, we have people at the Swedish Department of Foreign Affairs who are looking at strategies for involving the entire corps of diplomats in the Swedish establishment in reflective processes on values. They are trying to find a good way of locating and describing individual diplomats who have acted in a way conceived of as being representative of a value-oriented foreign affairs administration. They want to present those examples as something you can discuss as a way of developing a clearer sense of the deeper purpose of being a Foreign Affairs official, in terms of values, for example.

Q: I find it absolutely fascinating in that context that people are even willing to engage with each other in looking that carefully at questions of values.

A: There is a lot of resistance as well, so it's not all a rosy picture.

Q: Okay, we have 'good, clever, and wise.' Those are the first three categories and those were the fundamentals, right?

A: Yes, and we can take the remaining four much more rapidly because they actually follow from those three. But I find it useful to point the spotlight at some of those traits or characteristics as well.

The fourth one is '*curious*.' These are people who are curious. That follows from the wise aspect. They are aware of the limitations in perspectives and systems of meaning-making. That means that they are often strongly process-oriented.

They are interested in working in a way that invites people into inquiring processes. They don't believe that they already know everything that needs to be known. They don't believe that they or any other people already have all the solutions. They are interested in how we create processes where we can learn and discover more in order to find better solutions to central problems.

One of the main sources of frustration for these people is when they encounter people who resist inquiring processes. They are frustrated with processes in which people only criticize or have ready-made solutions to everything. They feel very uncomfortable in organizations where there is no space for searching for more and deeper knowledge,

where you can toss ideas around, where you can look at the drawbacks and advantages of a certain suggestion and where you can collaboratively develop new solutions. That's a quite important aspect of these people, this 'curious' trait.

Q: And something that calls forth their wisdom hopefully.

A: Yes, they are strongly interrelated.

Q: And the fifth item?

A: The fifth is that these people are "*inventive*". A more academic term would be "generative." Because they have this autonomous value system, they have an internal compass that points out their direction. That means that they very often generate new ideas about directions one could go in. They identify needs for change and they also come up with lots of ideas about what could be done. They are not embedded in existing structures, but they have cognitive freedom to think about possibilities, because they have differentiated their values from the existing structures.

These are people who are interested in change and have ideas about change. That is not always comfortable for large organizations to have. It means that they might land in conflicts and often land in dilemmas about, "…in what sense should I be loyal with the decisions already made and in what sense should I work for change even though there is already a policy?" But these people are generally very aware of this tension between the need to be loyal to democratically made decisions, on the one hand, and on the other hand to look for room to maneuver where they *can* push policies in new direction. That's the fifth aspect.

The sixth is that these are people I would like to call "*modest*." They don't have very strong needs for being visible, for getting attention, for getting recognition. They like it when they get it, but they are not *craving* attention and recognition. That means they have a kind of inner freedom to be solution-centered. They use several words and metaphors that capture this orientation in images. They talk about themselves as catalysts, as matchmakers, as enzymes and so on. They think of themselves as being actors in complex processes where it is not so important that, "I get credit for things, but I can contribute to better solutions for going in the direction of the values I find important…" and so on. If other people see this, good and well. If other people don't see this that is not so important, because they are satisfied anyway. So, these are people who often are not very visible to the general public. They work behind the scenes and they are quite content to do so.

Q: And the seventh?

A: The seventh is that these people are "*handy*." That's the English word I found closest to the Swedish word I am using. These are people who are quite pragmatic. They have a high level of social skills—emotional intelligence, social competence and so on. Because they have a good sense of how other people think, they are also quite able to be effective in evading other people's defenses and finding new ways to move things around.

Q: *Handy generally means that people can do things in the material world. Fix a clock or a lamp or an automobile. They are adept.*

A: Yes, that is what I'm after, at least metaphorically. It is a practical skill in getting things to work.

Q: *Isn't this Platonic in the sense that society needs people with differing sets of capabilities?*

A: Yes. I don't personally believe that these are things anyone could learn given enough time. I personally think that this also involves in-born talent. That is, of course, only an amateur theory of mine. But when I look around, I think that some people have the kind of natural talent for developing these kinds of skills and propensities whereas other people would have a very, very hard time or wouldn't even want to go in that direction.

Q: *So, this is the nature/nurture issue?*

A: Of course.

Q: *What are the implications of that for integral politics?*

A: I don't know if the implications are that far reaching, because any position you could take on nature/nurture has us back to the present moment where such development processes, if they are possible for all people, nevertheless move so slowly that it doesn't make a difference. In terms of our lifetime and our children's lifetime, we will live in a world with very unevenly distributed awareness, consciousness skills, identifications and so on. The people who have the inner freedom to put their talents and resources to work for the general good should have as good conditions as possible to do so effectively. That's somehow the way I think of it.

Q*:* *Where are you going from here with this research?*

A: I'm going to take a break from researching for a while and work more in the outside world, outside the university. I'm actually trying to put some of these things into action in terms of teaching and workshops for practitioners in various fields, but also in real world political processes. It could be smaller or larger issues.

I have some collaborative relationship with people at the Department of Foreign Affairs and allied authorities. I also work with the Crime Prevention Council here in Gothenburg, which is a very interesting organization with second tier people in it. They are presently concerned about an acrimonious debate going on about graffiti and how authorities should deal with young people who engage in illegal graffiti.

It is very interesting to think about how we can create inquiring processes for people who have diametrically opposed views on the best policy to follow here. If we can create processes that open up people's perspectives and make it possible to take in that there are different types of reasoning, we could apply it to this problem. So, those are some things I will do in the next few years. Maybe later I will go back to research and write up some

more theoretical things. I would like to do that, but for the moment, I'm inclined to engage in more practical activities.

Q: Do you anticipate that the training and development programs that you want to develop would draw on the research you've done in this project?

A: Certainly, very much. I do think in terms of creating a course for people who work with strategic change as leaders or as change agents in order to focus attention on skill development in this area. So, that's a direct implication of this research project. I think I have a quite distinct and clear picture of what kinds of skill development areas need to be included in such a program.

Q: Given what you said about nature and nurture, what would be some examples of skill development that you think can be nurtured?

A: First I think that it's important to find the right people, to find people who do have a good basis to build upon. Then I think that these seven traits or areas can be made the object of attention in a workshop or program as inquiring processes— inquiries into value systems, your own value system, how you relate to value issues, what you find important and how you work with value systems. Participants can focus on what this systemic understanding of causality actually means in their own fields of work. They can engage in processes that foster vision-logic capacity for perceiving and comparing perspectives. I don't expect it to be very difficult to develop a very meaningful training program.

Q: One part that I would wonder about is the selection of the participants, because it sounds like you're suggesting that there are people who are ready and can take advantage of this and people who are not.

A: I think it's not so very difficult to describe this course in such terms that the suitable people recognize, "This is what I've been looking for. This is something for me." Whereas people who are not really mature or right for this kind of project would say, "This sounds fluffy, it is probably a waste of time." So, I don't think that is very difficult. The most difficult thing is how to make such a training program known to the people who might benefit from it. You probably need to have patience and make use of informal networks of contact at the beginning and start from there, using the snowball effect.

Q: Finally, Thomas, what have you learned about yourself in relation to the model that you have created?

A: Well, I have certainly obtained a set of differentiations that allows me to orient myself more keenly in any kind of change project. I sometimes have a tendency for developing grandiose plans, and this framework reminds me to attend to complexities, use my energies where they have a fair chance of achieving something worthwhile and then let go of ambitions that simply go beyond what is possible at the time being. I think the framework helps me manage my own resources in a more efficient way.

Q: Thank you, Thomas.

A: Thank you.

Thomas Jordan, *E.D. is an associate professor at the Department of Work Science, Göteborg University, Sweden. He holds a doctorate in economic geography, but for ten years has worked primarily with research, teaching and training in the fields of conflict management and adult development. He has published articles and research reports in a number of academic journals and a comprehensive website in Swedish on workplace conflicts. Some of his English texts are available at www.perspectus,se/tjordan.*

Department of Work Science
Box 705
SE-40530 Göteborg
Sweden
E-mail: thomas.jordan@av.gu.se

Russ Volckmann, *Ph.D. was an organization development consultant for over 20 years and an executive coach since 1997. He holds a doctorate in political science from the University of California, Berkeley. Among his publications, including as publisher and editor of the Integral Leadership Review, are numerous interviews with leading thinkers and practitioners in organization change and leadership. Some may be found at www.leadcoach.com. He is also author of the E-book, A Leadership Opportunity: An Integral Approach.*

LeadCoach
733 Mermaid Avenue
Pacific Grove, CA 93950
E-Mail: russ@leadcoach.com